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SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES¹

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

III. THE HIGH SCHOOL PERIOD²

THE pioneer institution of the high school movement in this country, the English High School of Boston, was known at the first as the English Classical School. The history of its present title will be discussed later in this article. An alternative designation, which appears in the history of numerous other schools of this type, is that of "Union School." This title will be considered in connection with the development of state systems of secondary schools. Still another title which has been applied in some instances is that of "Free Academy." This hints at a close connection in thought between the high school and its immediate predecessor, the academy. The New York City College was known at first as the Free Academy. The high school at Albany bore the same title till 1873. The term *free* in this case seems to refer to gratuity of instruction.³ The memorial presented to the state legislature by the board of education of the city of New York, in 1847, relative to the establishment of a free academy, states that "one object of the proposed free institution is to create an additional interest in, and more completely popularize the Common Schools. It is believed that they will be regarded with additional favor, and attended with increased satisfaction, when the pupils and their parents feel that the children who have received their primary education in these schools can be admitted to all the benefits and advantages furnished by the

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²Continued from September number, 1898.

³Yet the Norristown (Connecticut) Free Academy requires, or did require until recently, the payment of a small tuition fee. It is not an ordinary high school, being a chartered and endowed institution. Dr. Steiner says of this school that it "better than almost any other in the State, combines the good features of the old academy with those of the new high school."— *The History of Education in Connecticut*, p. 53.

best endowed college in the state without any expense whatever."¹

In 1818 Boston had established, in addition to the several schools enumerated in Winterbotham's historical account, a system of primary schools. In 1820, steps were taken looking to an extension of the school system upward, in an institution planned with reference to the needs of those pupils who were not destined for the classical course of the Latin School. On the forty-fifth anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill, the School Committee having under consideration the question of appointments and salaries in the Latin School for the ensuing year, Mr. S. A. Wells introduced a number of resolutions relating, in part, to the establishment of an "English Classical School."² This part of the resolution was referred to a sub-committee, which reported October 26 of the same year. On this date the School Committee voted "that it is expedient to establish an English Classical School in the Town of Boston." At a subsequent meeting the Selectmen of the town were requested to call a town meeting for the consideration of the sub-committee's report as amended by the School Committee. A town meeting was accordingly held on January 15, 1821, at which the plan outlined in the report was debated, and finally adopted with only three dissenting votes.

The Boston *Advertiser* of January 13, 1821, had sounded a note of caution in the following paragraph:

A town meeting is to be holden on Monday next, to act, among other things, on the proposition for establishing what is called an *English Classical School*. We trust that a measure of this sort will not be adopted without due consideration. It ought to be considered what will be the effect of it on the existing English Grammar Schools, and also on the Latin Grammar School. Will not its effect be to degrade the former institutions, by transferring the more liberal studies now pursued in them, and for which they are, or ought to be, fully competent, to a single school more favored by the public. And is it not the intention of some of the friends of the new school

¹ BOESE, *Public Education in the City of New York*, p. 75.

² I am indebted to Mr. George H. Martin, supervisor of public schools, Boston, and author of *The Evolution of the Massachusetts Public School System*, for the opportunity of using the MS. records of the Boston School Committee in preparing this account.

to withdraw a portion of the patronage which is now bestowed on the Latin School?

But the nearly unanimous vote to establish the school seems to show that the consideration of these doubts resulted in sweeping them aside.

The same town meeting passed a second vote, "That the School Committee from year to year be, and hereby are instructed to revise the course of studies proposed in the report this day made and accepted for the new school, and adopt such measures as experience shall dictate, and the object of its establishment require."

The sub-committee's report, presumably as amended and presented to the town meeting, stands as follows on the records of the School Committee:

REPORT

Though the present system of public education, and the munificence with which it is supported, are highly beneficial and honorable to the Town; yet in the opinion of the Committee, it is susceptible of a greater degree of perfection and usefulness, without materially augmenting the weight of the public burdens. Till recently, our system occupied a middle station: it neither commenced with the rudiments of education, nor extended to the higher branches of knowledge. This system was supported by the Town at a very great expense, and to be admitted to its advantages, certain preliminary qualifications were required at individual cost, which have the effect of excluding many children of the poor and unfortunate classes of the community from the benefits of a public education. The Town saw and felt this inconsistency in the plan, and have removed the defect by providing Schools in which the children of the poor can be fitted for admission into the public seminaries.

The present system, in the opinion of the Committee, requires still farther amendment. The studies that are pursued at the English grammar schools are merely elementary, and more time than is necessary is devoted to their acquisition. A scholar is admitted at seven, and is dismissed at fourteen years of age;

thus seven years are expended in the acquisition of a degree of knowledge, which with ordinary diligence and a common capacity may be easily and perfectly acquired in five. If then, a boy remain the usual term, a large portion of the time will have been dly or uselessly expended, as he may have learned all that he may have been taught long before its expiration. This loss of time occurs at that interesting and critical period of life, when the habits and inclinations are forming by which the future character will be fixed and determined. This evil, therefore, should be removed, by enlarging the present system, not merely that the time now lost may be saved, but that those early habits of industry and application may be acquired, which are so essential in leading to a future life of virtue and usefulness.

Nor are these the only existing evils. The mode of education now adopted, and the branches of knowledge that are taught at our English grammar schools, are not sufficiently extensive, nor otherwise calculated to bring the powers of the mind into operation nor to qualify a youth to fill usefully and respectably many of those stations, both public and private, in which he may be placed. A parent who wishes to give a child an education that shall fit him for active life, and shall serve as a foundation for eminence in his profession, whether Mercantile or Mechanical, is under the necessity of giving him a different education from any which our public schools can now furnish. Hence many children are separated from their parents and sent to private academies in this vicinity, to acquire that instruction which cannot be obtained at the public seminaries. Thus, many parents, who contribute largely to the support of these institutions, are subjected to heavy expense for the same object, in other towns.

The Committee, for these and many other weighty considerations that might be offered, and in order to render the present system of public education more nearly perfect, are of opinion, that an additional School is required. They therefore, recommend the founding of a seminary which shall be called the English Classical School, and submit the following as a general outline of a plan for its organization and of the course of studies to be pursued:

1st. That the term of time for pursuing the course of studies proposed be three years.

2ndly. That the School be divided into three classes, and one year be assigned to the studies of each class.

3rdly. That the age of admission be not less than twelve years.

4thly. That the School be for Boys exclusively.

5thly. That candidates for admission be proposed on a given day annually; but scholars with suitable qualifications may be admitted at any intermediate time to an advanced standing.

6thly. That candidates for admission shall be subject to a strict examination, in such manner as the School Committee may direct, to ascertain their qualifications according to these rules.

7thly. That it be required of every candidate, to qualify him for admission, that he be well acquainted with reading, writing, English grammar in all its branches, and arithmetic as far as simple proportion.

8thly. That it be required of the Masters and Ushers, as a necessary qualification, that they shall have been regularly educated at some University.

The Studies of the First Class to be as follows;

Composition.

Reading from the most approved authors.

Exercises in Criticism; comprising critical analyses of the language, grammar, and style of the best English authors, their errors & beauties.

Declamation.

Geography.

Arithmetic continued.

The Studies of the Second Class.

Composition.

Reading.

Exercises in Criticism.

Declamation,

Algebra.

Ancient and Modern History and Chronology.

Logic.

Geometry.



Plane Trigonometry ; and its application to mensuration of Heights and Distances.

Navigation.

Surveying.

Mensuration of Superficies & Solids.

Forensic Discussions.

The Studies of the Third Class.

Composition ;

Exercises in Criticism ;

Declamation ;

Mathematics ;

Logic ;

History ; particularly that of the United States ;]

Natural Philosophy, including Astronomy ;

Moral and Political Philosophy.

} Continued

[A financial statement follows, in which it is proposed that \$4000 yearly be spent on the school to support a Master, sub-master, and two ushers. The report then closes with general considerations relating to the usefulness of public schools.]

The school opened in May 1821, with Mr. George Barrell Emerson as principal master, and a membership of over one hundred pupils.

It was decided, "That the third story of the new Schoolhouse in Derne Street be appropriated for the present to the use of the English Classical School." Three years later, June 23, 1824, "it was *Voted* that the schoolhouse which the city is now building on Pinckney Street be appropriated to the use and accommodation of the *English High School* :—that the Grammar School, on Derne Street, be hereafter called and known by the name of the *Bowdoin School* ; and that the vote of 11th May, giving that name to the house on Pinckney St. be repealed."

ELMER E. BROWN

(To be continued)